

**Thomas Jefferson to Walter Jones, March 5, 1810,
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by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO DOCTOR WALTER JONES J. MSS.

Monticello, March 5, 1810.

Dear Sir, —I received duly your favor of the 19th ultimo, and I salute you with all ancient and recent recollections of friendship. I have learned, with real sorrow, that circumstances have arisen among our executive counsellors, which have rendered foes those who once were friends. To themselves it will be a source of infinite pain and vexation, and therefore chiefly I lament it, for I have a sincere esteem for both parties. To the President it will be really inconvenient; but to the nation I do not know that it can do serious injury, unless we were to believe the newspapers, which pretend that Mr. Gallatin will go out. That indeed would be a day of mourning for the United States; but I hope that the position of both gentlemen may be made so easy as to give no cause for either to withdraw. The ordinary business of every day is done by consultation between the President and the Head of the department alone to which it belongs. For measures of importance or difficulty, a consultation is held with the Heads of departments, either assembled, or by taking their opinions separately in conversation or in writing. The latter is most strictly in the spirit of the constitution. Because the President, on weighing the advice of all, is left free to make up an opinion for himself. In this way they are not brought together, and it is not necessarily known to any what opinion the others have given. This was General Washington's practice for the first two or three years of his administration, till the affairs of France and England threatened to embroil us, and rendered consideration and discussion

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desirable. In these discussions, Hamilton and myself were daily pitted in the cabinet like two cocks. We were then but four in number, and, according to the majority, which of course was three to one, the President decided. The pain was for Hamilton and myself, but the public experienced no inconvenience. I practised this last method, because

the harmony was so cordial among us all, that we never failed, by a contribution of mutual views on the subject, to form an opinion acceptable to the whole. I think there never was one instance to the contrary, in any case of consequence. Yet this does, in fact, transform the executive into a directory, and I hold the other method to be more constitutional. It is better calculated too to prevent collision and irritation, and to cure it, or at least suppress its effects when it has already taken place. It is the obvious and sufficient remedy in the present case, and will doubtless be resorted to.

Our difficulties are indeed great, if we consider ourselves alone. But when viewed in comparison to those of Europe, they are the joys of Paradise. In the eternal revolution of ages, the destinies have placed our portion of existence amidst such scenes of tumult and outrage, as no other period, within our knowledge, had presented. Every government but one on the continent of Europe, demolished, a conqueror roaming over the earth with havoc and destruction, a pirate spreading misery and ruin over the face of the ocean. Indeed, my friend, ours is a bed of roses. And the system of government which shall keep us afloat amidst the wreck of the world, will be immortalized in history. We have, to be sure, our petty squabbles and heart burnings, and we have something of the blue devils at times, as to these raw heads and bloody bones who are eating up other nations. But happily for us, the Mammoth cannot swim, nor the Leviathan move on dry land; and if we will keep out of their way, they cannot get at us. If, indeed, we choose to place ourselves within the scope of their tether, a gripe of the paw, or flounce of the tail, may be our fortune. Our business certainly was to be still. But a part of our nation chose to declare against this, in such a way as to control the wisdom of the government. I yielded with others, to avoid a greater evil. But from that moment, I have seen no system which could keep us entirely aloof from these agents of destruction. If there be any, I am certain that

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you, my friends, now charged with the care of us all, will see and pursue it. I give myself, therefore, no trouble with thinking or puzzling about it. Being confident in my watchmen I sleep soundly. God bless you all, and send you a safe deliverance.